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November 29, 2005

USDA 2007 Farm Bill Listening Session
Office of the Executive Secretariat, Room 116A
Jamie L. Whitten Federal Building
1400 Independence Avenue SW.
Washington, DC 20250-3355.

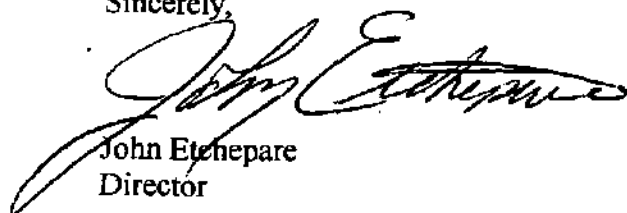
Dear Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Johanns,

The Wyoming Department of Agriculture realizes the importance of agriculture in the lives of United States citizens and the impact that U.S. agriculture has on the world economy. As the director of the Wyoming Department of Agriculture my staff and I are reviewing the many issues surrounding the upcoming farm bill and understand how difficult it is going to be to enact legislation that is going to meet the needs of the U.S. agriculture community and the interests of the nation.

In an effort to aide in this process, The Wyoming Department of Agriculture is submitting testimony supporting USDA / APHIS / Wildlife Services funding and the educational needs of this program. Our attached proposal stress's the importance of this issue to the citizens of Wyoming and the nation. Please review the contents and take our recommendations under advisement.

Thank you for all of your efforts in seeking input through the 2007 Farm Bill listening sessions

Sincerely,



John Etchepare
Director

Attachment

**Testimony to the United States Department of Agriculture 2007 Farm Bill
Proposal Submitted by The Wyoming Department Agriculture**

Prepared By:

**Hank Uhden, Administrative Officer, Animal Damage Management Board
Sarka J. White, Education Director, Wyoming Department of Agriculture**

**Testimony to the United States Department of Agriculture
2007 Farm Bill**

Overview of support and recommended program direction for Wildlife Services and animal damage management.

In this testimony, we will demonstrate the recommended program direction for Wildlife Services to:

1. Increase the level of funding support for Wildlife Services as a whole to properly alleviate wildlife damage.
2. Fund and implement a strong education and information campaign to properly and correctly educate our youth, adult population and public awareness.

Background:**

Wildlife is greatly valued by the American public, bringing important recreational, aesthetic, and income-generating benefits. At the same time, however, some wildlife destroy crops, kill livestock, damage property, and pose risks to public health and safety.

As the U.S. population has grown and impinged upon wildlife habitats, conflicts between wildlife and humans and their private property have become increasingly common, making modern wildlife management more challenging. The use of some methods of controlling wildlife, especially lethal methods, has been a subject of considerable and continuing controversy. Wildlife Services, a key program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, is tasked with controlling damage by wildlife, primarily mammals and birds. In carrying out its activities, Wildlife Services considers and applies what it believes to be the most appropriate methods—whether lethal or nonlethal—of prevention and control.

Some wildlife can pose significant threats to Americans and their property and can cause costly damage and loss. Mammals and birds damage crops, forestry seedlings, and aquaculture products each year, at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars. Livestock, like all private property is vulnerable as well. In fiscal year 2000, predators (primarily coyotes) killed nearly half a million livestock—mostly lambs and calves—valued at about \$70 million. Some predators also prey on big game animals, game birds, and other wildlife, including endangered species. Beavers, woodchucks, and other species cause millions of dollars in damage each year to property such as roads, bridges, dams, water drainage systems, and electrical utilities.

Wildlife can attack and injure people, sometimes fatally, and can harbor diseases, such as rabies and West Nile virus, that threaten human health. Wildlife Services conducts both operational and research activities to curb damage by wildlife. Generally, the program's agricultural clients (e.g., farmers and ranchers) already have several nonlethal controls in

place, such as fences, guard animals, and chemical repellents, to deter wildlife. When these controls prove insufficient, clients seek assistance from Wildlife Services. The program's research includes studying the biology and behavior of injurious animals, and methods to alleviate the damage caused by wildlife.

The most comprehensive study of the program's effectiveness, issued in 1994, concluded that Wildlife Services' current program, which uses all practical methods (both lethal and nonlethal) of control and prevention, was the most cost effective of the program alternatives evaluated. Other studies, focused on specific program activities, have shown that program benefits exceed costs by ratios ranging from 3:1 to 27:1.

However, developing effective, practical, and economical nonlethal control measures has been a challenge, largely for two reasons. Wildlife are valuable to society in many ways, providing a wide range of social, ecological, and economic benefits, for example, hunting and bird watching are important as both recreational and income-generating activities.

During the last decade, wildlife seem to have become an almost universal object for concern, a symbol for environmental issues, and a focus for resource management, according to a Cornell University extension publication. However, the publication also notes that actual encounters with wildlife are frequently viewed as a nuisance or are associated with damage and unwanted costs. For example, the coyote is one of the most successful and ubiquitous predators in the United States and coyote predation on livestock are serious problems for U.S. producers. In the United States, wildlife are a publicly owned resource held in trust and managed by federal and state agencies. In general, the federal government manages threatened and endangered species and migratory birds, while the states manage big game, other mammals, and birds. Wildlife Services is authorized by Congress to conduct activities relating to most wildlife damage situations.

The practice of managing wildlife is not new, nor is the control of predators. For centuries, control of mammalian predators has been practiced worldwide as a means of protecting livestock and enhancing other wildlife populations. Federal wildlife control activities have evolved along with demographic and societal changes. In the program's early years the emphasis was on conducting general eradication campaigns that might be directed at the entire statewide population of a particular species of predator. As public attitudes changed, the program's focus changed as well, and it now emphasizes lethal management of only problem animals when necessary.

Generally, Wildlife Services conducts its operational activities in response to requests for assistance. The program coordinates its operational activities with other entities, such as state departments of wildlife, local agricultural extension services, and private animal removal services.

The program's research activities are headed by the National Wildlife Research Center, located in Fort Collins, Colorado. The center has three research programs: product development research, bird research, and mammal research. Whereas most of the product development research is done at the center, most of the bird and mammal research is done at

field stations across the country. To augment their staff of scientists and technicians, the research programs rely on undergraduate and graduate students, post-doctoral appointments, and volunteers.

People exist as only one element in the natural world. Increasingly, as wildlife habitat shrinks due to human population growth and activities, clashes occur between people and wildlife. These clashes take many forms. For example, mammals and birds can damage crops and forestry resources, deplete aquaculture stock, destroy livestock, and despoil private property. Further, they pose threats to human health and safety through the spread of disease (e.g., rabies and West Nile virus); through direct attacks on humans; and through collisions with passenger cars, trucks, trains, and aircraft. The effects of injurious wildlife are not limited to rural populations; suburbanites are grappling with how to best deal with growing deer, geese, and beaver populations that damage property and pose threats to human health.

**** Background excerpts summarized from the United States General Accounting Office, Washington, DC 20548, report to Congressional Committees, November, 2001.**

Support of the Wildlife Services program:

The Wyoming Department of Agriculture greatly appreciates the assistance provided to the citizens of the state by the Wyoming office of Wildlife Services. However, the State of Wyoming is seeing a robust growth of new housing and population growth. The central western states as a whole are experiencing a translocation of human population to their major communities.

With that human translocation, wildlife damage and wildlife disease issues are also increasing. In addition, with the reintroduction of, and a 25% per year expanding population of wolves, wildlife damage and depredation is exponentially increasing to the point that adequate funding is direly needed.

Wyoming is also experiencing a multitude of other issues that have risen to the forefront needing funding. Ravens, whose population has never been greater in known history, have for the first time exceeded the level of predation to lambs over the level of coyote predation for some producers. Also, the roosting sites for these birds have greatly impacted food grade facilities due to the amount of fecal matter deposited. The Exxon plant, a sodium bicarbonate processing facility routinely uses Wildlife Services to haze the birds away, but still expends over \$18,000.00 per annum to clean the facility as it is used as a nightly roost.

Wolves, as stated above, are increasing at an unforeseen rate of 25% each year. Known wolf depredations are exponentially increasing as well. Very limited and severely inadequate federal funding is currently being provided to address the issues regarding this non-essential experimental population of wolves. Wyoming has not been afforded state oversight of this animal, so it remains under federal oversight and management. Therefore, the federal

government is first and foremost responsible for funding programs to address the issues that surround the management of this species.

Wildlife Services, also plays a key role in assisting the Wyoming Game & Fish to alleviate black bear, grizzly bear and mountain lion depredations on private property. Through executed agreements and memorandums of understanding, the development of strong federal and state relationships have been fostered to achieve the desired management goals.

Disease issues such as rabies, hantavirus, and plague have garnered the attention of the citizenry and media in Wyoming. Wyoming, through cooperative partnerships with the Wyoming Animal Damage Management Board, Wyoming Dept. of Health, Wyoming Department of Agriculture, Wyoming Game & Fish Dept., and the Wyoming Livestock Board, have all worked to address these issues. Wyoming has also become a key player in the research and development of an oral rabies vaccine for skunks. Wyoming experienced another death to due to plague in the fall of 2004. Wildlife Services, has implemented a four county prevalence survey to determine the true level of this disease.

These are just some of the many issues outside of normal program activities that Wildlife Services does to serve the state.

Education of the public at large:

Early education. Because the human population continues to grow, and as a result shares the same habitat as wildlife, education of the public is a needed facet. Case in point, the knowledge base of the human population is steadily decreasing as each next generation of people move farther from the land, losing the interconnectivity of the use of natural resources and the end consumable product.

Early education of our youth in the area of animal damage management is needed in today's society. Although we continue to offer information for use in our classrooms, much of that information is on a voluntarily used basis. Our classrooms need an unbiased structured education standards compliant discipline on the subject of animal damage management, specifically formatted for easy integration into the curriculum. The classrooms in America today are bombarded by agenda driven wildlife information, and in cases misinformation directed to our youth. The USDA should take a strong stance and develop curricula that brings the entire picture of wildlife management to the classroom. With accurate knowledge, our youth will take that information into adulthood.

Agriculture in the Classroom organizations nationwide, with support from the USDAb could provide the needed materials and education to youth nationwide. Agriculture in the Classroom programs have developed many useful and practical programs for use in classrooms across the United States. These programs have a close relationship with public, private, and home schools across the nation. They can reach more youth than any other organization. By supporting Agriculture in the Classroom organizations, we can ensure that the educational materials that are produced are of top quality and are linked to state and

national educational standards. This will ensure that students will receive the best quality instruction and that learning will be relevant and interesting.

Supporting Agriculture in the Classroom programs through the Farm Bill will also ensure that the link between natural resources, agriculture, predator management, and mineral production are all addressed and taught. The issue of educating youth on predatory management is not a solitary issue. Students must be taught the importance of range management, natural resource conservation, mineral production, issues surrounding predators, and issues around weeds and pests must all be explored and taught. All of these areas are dependant upon each other and must be taught as such. This is why it is vital to support Agriculture in the Classroom programs. Agriculture in the Classroom programs address each of these areas and with support can reach students nationwide with these messages.

Advanced education. This same approach to animal damage management needs to be taken to our colleges. The conveyance of information that all predator/prey relationships are natural is not only shortsighted, but also not truthful in today's society. If we so blindly accept, or teach this methodology, then the end product is a product of resolutely misinformed adults. **Today's society manages its wildlife solely as a prey base. The predator side of the equation is often neglected in the current system of management. We need to take a holistic view and manage the predators with the same methodology of all wildlife.**

Universities hold education programs that can not only teach students in general classes but can provide vital training to educators on the importance of teaching the relationships between predator/ prey. Agriculture in the Classroom organizations link with universities to offer classes and summer institutes to provide educators with the most up to date information and resources in teaching areas and this is an area that needs to be addressed. By providing extended learning opportunities for educators, we can provide current information, training, and resources to teachers.

Adult education of the general populace. But we cannot stop simply with our youth. The adult sector of our population also needs this key educational component delivered. Only when there is a conflict with wildlife, do people respond, usually in an uneducated fashion to that conflict. In addition, their knowledge base as a whole, fails to recognize the "big" picture of the interconnectivity of the use of natural resources and the end consumable product. In summary, the U.S. citizens as a whole need a greater public awareness and appreciation of the need for wildlife damage issues to be addressed.

Recommended program direction. A strong education and information campaign as outlined above needs to be funded and implemented to properly and correctly educate our youth and adult population.

Recommended program direction. A strong animal damage management program as outlined above needs to receive increased funding to implement a total integrated management program.

Conclusion:

The key to having a successful, quality and innovative management program can be achieved through four core components:

- **Strong management program that provides services through a holistic method of viable solutions.**
- **A strong research program that provides innovation and data driven solutions that benefit both sides of the issue.**
- **A strong information and education program that provides correct and current information in an unbiased medium.**
- **A strong program administration that supports the other core components with the allocation of adequate resources both financially and logistically, that will provide for a stable continued of the program.**

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